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JESUS' ARREST AND TRIAL¹

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DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT

For the most part, the sources for this material are found in Mark's Gospel. Matthew has incorporated nearly everything that Mark has, adding a few verses, for example 26:52, 54, from some other source. Mark has one incident (Mark 14:51, 52) which neither of the other writers uses. Luke adds the incident of the healing of the ear (Luke 22:51). The matter in John and Luke (John 18:1-27; Luke 22:39-71) differs somewhat in detail from the Mark-Matthew accounts, but not in such a way as to give rise to any serious problems. John adds color and definiteness, showing a greater interest than the synoptists in the details of the events.

Our material begins at the close of the narrative of the Passover supper. Luke notes the fact incidentally that it was the custom of Jesus to go out to the Mount of Olives and says that the disciples also followed him (Luke 22:39); while John says Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples (John 18:2). Luke does not name the place Gethsemane nor does John (John 18:1), who says it was over the brook Kidron where was a garden. John puts this event following the high-priestly prayer of Jesus in John, chap. 17, which came after the last discourses recorded in John, chaps. 14 to 16 inclusive. Matthew and Mark both name the garden in their accounts. Neither Luke nor John mentions the taking with him of Peter, James, and John further into the garden than the others. Luke says he was parted from them about a stone's cast (Luke 22:41), while John does not intimate that he was separated from them at all or that there was any prayer or agony in the garden; simply that Jesus and his disciples went to the garden and that Judas knowing the place, having received a band

¹ This study covers the International Uniform Sunday School Lessons for November 20, 27, and December 4.

or cohort of soldiers and officers from the chief priests, came to arrest him (John 18:3). Luke speaks of Jesus' prayer to have the cup removed as having been uttered but once, when an angel came and strengthened him, after which he prayed the more earnestly until the sweat became blood (Luke is the only one who mentions this [22:43, 44], and these verses are missing in several of the best manuscripts and are regarded by most scholars to be probably an interpolation). Returning to the disciples he found them sleeping from sorrow (Luke 22:45). Matthew and Mark explain this sleep by saying that their eyes were heavy (Matt. 26:43; Mark 14:40). In Luke the disciples as they enter the garden and at the close of Jesus' praying, are enjoined by him to pray that they enter not into temptation, while Matthew and Mark put this injunction after the first return of Jesus to find the three asleep, and make Jesus add, apparently with sympathy, "the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

All the evangelists imply that Judas was leading the company that came for the arrest. The synoptists agree that Judas kissed Jesus, but John simply says he was "standing with them" (John 18:5). Matthew and Mark say that the kiss had been agreed upon as a sign to the band, implying that in the darkness they might arrest the wrong person. Luke records a rebuke uttered by Jesus to Judas: "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" (22:48) implying that Jesus also understood that the kiss was only a means of identifying him to the soldiers. All the writers tell of the attempt on the part of one to defend Jesus by force of arms, and their accounts are in substantial agreement. All say that it was the servant of the high priest who received the blow and the wound. Luke 22:49 makes the disciples ask, "Shall we smite with the sword?" and John gives the servant's name as Malchus and the one giving the blow as Peter (18:10). Luke—the physician—adds that Jesus touched the ear and healed it (18:51). Matthew (26:52) and John (18:11) record Jesus' bidding to put up the sword, Matthew adding that those who take the sword shall perish with the sword, while John records the question, "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?" In Matthew (26:53) Jesus reminds them that he can summon twelve legions of angels

if he will, but that the Scriptures must be fulfilled (cf. Mark 14:49b). The synoptists all record Jesus' address to his pursuers in which he reminds them that they do not need to come for him as for a robber with the paraphernalia of the police; he has not hidden away from them; they could have taken him any day as he was in the temple with them teaching. Luke makes him add to this, "But this is your hour and the power of darkness," implying that it was on their own account rather than on his that they chose this time of the day and this manner for his capture.

Matthew and Mark tell that as soon as he was seized the disciples all left him and fled; John (18:8) however says that Jesus asked the officers to let the disciples go their way if it was himself they sought, though like Luke he does not expressly say they fled; but both imply this in the picture they draw of Peter following afar off. Mark adds as a kind of postscript (14:51,52) the incident about the half-clad young man that followed him. John's account of the arrest is more dramatic than that of the synoptists. Jesus goes forth to meet the company and asks the second time whom they seek, before they can recover their self-possession sufficiently to take him away.

THE TRIAL BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES

John gives an account of one trial before the Jewish authorities that is not even mentioned by the other writers, while he gives no account of the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, only mentioning the fact that after Annas had examined Jesus he sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest (John 18:24). According to John, Jesus is led directly to the court of Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Peter and John, having followed, were admitted to the trial, and here Peter denied his Lord for the first time (John 18:17). The attempt was made by Annas to have Jesus tell of his own teachings. He refused on the ground that his teaching had been all made openly, and demanded that witnesses be brought who had heard him. After suffering insult from an officer he was sent bound to Caiaphas, who was the high priest. Annas had been high priest in the years 6-15 A.D.; by courtesy the title of high priest continued to be used of him, and

he still had influence. According to Luke's account (22:63-65) Jesus is led to the high priest's house and there suffers physical indignities until the assembling of the Sanhedrin in the morning, and the examination and the conviction come after daybreak. Neither Annas nor Caiaphas is named in his narrative. Matthew's and Mark's accounts place the trial before daybreak. It has been suggested by way of harmony that perhaps the entire Sanhedrin remained in session until daybreak, then formally condemning Jesus, as Matthew and Mark seem to imply. Luke's narrative would in that case harmonize with the other synoptists'. In the trial before Caiaphas the effort was made to secure at least two witnesses, according to Mark and Matthew, whose testimony would agree. Failing in this, the effort was made to have the prisoner testify against himself, but this was met only by the silence of Jesus. The question, "Art thou the Christ?" brought a reply at last, and on this reply Jesus was speedily condemned to death.

PETER'S DENIAL

The narratives of this vary only a little. Matthew and Mark place the record of the denial after the record of the condemnation by the Sanhedrin and the buffeting Jesus received at the hands of the officers, while Luke places it before this and puts it into the place occupied in Matthew and Mark by the story of the examination, which Luke, as seen above, describes as having taken place in the morning (Luke 26:66-71). All the evangelists had placed the prediction of this denial immediately at the close of the Passover supper. In Luke and John it is not said that Peter affirmed on oath that he did not know Jesus, while this fact is made prominent by Matthew and Mark. According to these latter evangelists, too, the denial occurred in connection with the trial by the Sanhedrin during the night as Peter sat by the fire with the officers, before they proceeded with the trial (Mark 14:54; Matt. 26:58). Luke, who does not mention a gathering of the Sanhedrin until the morning, as noted above, apparently puts the denial at the high priest's house, while those having charge of Jesus waited for the day. John would seem to place one denial at the house of Annas (18:15-18) and two at Caiaphas' court (18:25-27), as the transfer of Jesus from

Annas to Caiaphas comes between these two accounts. However, as Peter seems to be standing at the same fire warming himself in both incidents, some think that John meant that the three denials took place at the house of Annas, on the ground that the representation of Peter and the officers sitting about the fire in the court suits the period of waiting in the house of Annas better than it does the time of the trial by the Sanhedrin.² The question then as to whether the denials of Peter took place at the court of Annas or at the trial by the Sanhedrin or part in one place and part in the other must be left undecided. However, the lesson from the denials of Peter is the same in each case, and no essential difference is made by this uncertainty as to time and place.

DISCUSSION OF INCIDENTS AND APPLICATION

Gethsemane.—The traditional site of Gethsemane—"oil-press"—is about fifty yards beyond St. Stephen's Gate east of the city walls. Some one has suggested that Jesus went here that the trouble which would probably overtake him might not involve his friends who had given him the use of the guest-chamber. Certainly he went to the garden for prayer alone, for though he had spoken often of his approaching death, as in the other hard places in his life, so much the more now, must he seek strength in communion with his Father. Leaving the disciples in two groups, one of eight and the other of three, as it were outer and inner guards, to keep the watch with him, alone he prayed. Who heard the prayers of that aching heart? The disciples slept. Did Jesus tell them what he said, or did they who were near to him know that Jesus still hoped that the cup would pass from him? Had he not talked with them on the way? At least he had said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even to the point of death." Only two days before they had heard him pray, "Father save me from this hour, but for this cause came I unto this hour." If he came immediately to the garden from those discourses in the upper room recorded by John, as the record seems to show, it is not unlikely that the burden of his prayer was in their consciousness as well as in his own, and

² Gilbert, *Students' Life of Jesus*, p. 285.

that they too made the same petition for him until sleep overtook them.

There is nothing strange in the Gethsemane prayer. In spite of the fact that Jesus had spoken so frequently about his coming death and even of its significance, the question must ever arise, could he be mistaken in his course, and if not, had he strength to go straight through to the end? He needed the Father's presence and assurance now, for the hour must be close at hand. If Jesus was human at all, this hour of anguish was inevitable. He discovered, too, that he was even more alone than he had thought. The sleeping eleven and the traitorous Judas told all too plainly that he was to tread the winepress alone.

No being ever faced such a day, for no being ever loved as Jesus loved the people who were about to crucify him. No one had ever offered to men what he had offered only to be rejected; and no one had ever had such a knowledge and abhorrence of sin or had seen how it pains and dishonors the Father. . . . No one in the church of God sympathized with his conception of the Messiah. The very people to whom God had most clearly revealed his will were about to cast Jesus out as a dangerous fanatic. The truth he had seen he must still cherish alone; not one human being to look with approval upon his course.³

The Arrest.—The force that came to arrest Jesus was probably a group of the temple police (though John mentions a Roman cohort [18:3] and the synoptists speak of them as a multitude). Considering all the circumstances, a considerable number was needed to insure a successful venture. Excepting the slight casualty occasioned by Peter's tempestuous nature and the consternation occasioned in the ranks of the police when they actually stood before Jesus, the capture was peaceful. Jesus was ready after his prayer and went with his disciples to meet them. That the sting of Judas' conduct was deeply felt is seen in the words—the last words he spoke to his disciples—"Arise, let us be going, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Note the word "betrayed." While he was reconciled to the Father's will, the bitterness that came from the betrayal was present even in this last moment with his own disciples. Yet thoughtful in this hour as he had been when he said, "Sleep on now and take your

³ Gilbert, *Students' Life of Jesus*, p. 277.

rest," he was mindful of their safety and begged that they might escape. In their fright and exhausted condition they readily accepted this opportunity, two only turning back from afar to see the end.

In the trial before the Jewish authorities, first before Annas as John records, then before the Sanhedrin, presided over by Caiaphas, Jesus remained calm and firm. There is no weakness, fear, or confusion. He stood upon his legal rights as a prisoner in the presence of Annas. There were no witnesses, there was no charge, and there was no occasion or obligation on Jesus' part to answer the questions which were put to him by Annas. His rebuke of the officer who struck him and his reply to Annas which had occasioned the blow were both full of dignity and entirely in place, for both the private examination before Annas and the conduct of the officer toward Jesus were contrary to the express provisions of the rabbinical criminal code.

The trial before the Sanhedrin was conducted with little more regard for legal procedure than was the examination before Annas. In the first place, when no indictment could be brought against him, not even the testimony of two witnesses agreeing, Caiaphas sought to have Jesus testify against himself, which was a violation of their legal code. The Jewish courts required that two witnesses should concur in their testimony before an indictment could be found; also it would be necessary to make out a case that would stand in the Roman court if they were to compass their purpose. The only charge that was specified in the record was that he had spoken slighly of the temple. According to Jewish law he should now have been released. Failing to elicit any response from these baseless charges, Caiaphas propounded the question to him, "Art thou the Christ?" His answer, according to the synoptists, was his first public claim to Messiahship, and he coupled with it the warning and the prediction that the time would come when he would be vindicated and, instead of occupying the place of prisoner, would be the supreme judge. If up to this time there could exist any doubt as to Jesus' real attitude, this reply must settle it forever. He had not been silent in order to save himself. There was no fear in him of the consequences of the trial. His regard for

himself and for the legal form, and his unwillingness to have any part in their quibbles, and the sense of his own superiority had caused him to be silent during these hours.

The Sanhedrin wanted no more testimony than these words of Jesus, which they pronounced to be blasphemy. Caiaphas in the fierceness of his indignation rent his clothes. The vote that was taken condemned Jesus to be worthy of death. In doing this the Sanhedrin had disregarded their own law in three directions. It was forbidden⁴ (1) to try criminals in the night, (2) to pass judgment before one night had elapsed after the trial, (3) to try criminal cases on the day before the Sabbath or a feast. The physical indignities which they heaped upon him immediately following were as illegal as the rest, as only a condemned criminal could thus be treated. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth," and yet his whole attitude was full of challenge, and there was the same calm confidence in himself and his mission that had characterized his whole ministry. Jesus never appears to better advantage than in these trying circumstances. "Love your enemies" had been his word to the world. Alone and with no friend to sympathize he now faced his enemies on every side. There was no bitterness or hatred or ill-wishing toward them revealed in anything he said or did. He declared the truth even more openly than he had done before. There is no stronger contrast in literature or history than that presented by Jesus and his persecutors at this trial. Truly he was fit to be the Savior of the world.

Peter's denial.—Psychologically Peter's denial is no puzzle. It was as human as all the rest of the events of the night. Jesus had warned Peter and told him that he had prayed for him that his faith fail not. He had warned him again in the garden to watch and pray to be kept from temptation. Peter had boasted that he would go with his Master to death. He was not so conscious of his need of strength as was his Master, else he would have prayed instead of having slept in the garden. Coupled with this weakness of the spirit there was the weakness of the flesh, for he was exhausted by the exertions of the week. But more than all this was the

⁴ Burton and Mathews, *Life of Christ*, p. 262.

intellectual doubt that was poisoning his mind as well as the minds of all the disciples. Their conception of the messiahship had been wrong. The capture of their leader was proof to them that they had been mistaken in their estimate of him. True, the personal affection and loyalty were not thus quickly taken away, and yet this, too, was weakened by the discovery that somehow they had been deceived. What need to involve themselves further in his difficulties? Could Peter have seen with a clear vision the significance and inevitableness of the occurrences of the day it is hard to believe that he would have lost for even a moment his loyalty to his Master, so that Peter's sin was mainly a sin against personal devotion and affection rather than against his loyalty to his own ideals of the kingdom and of righteousness.

Can we explain Judas' fall in the same way? Like the rest of them, Judas' ideal of the Messiah and his kingdom were evidently wrong. With the others he was mistaken here, but Judas' sin was a deliberate and premeditated sin against personal loyalty, coupled with a desire to turn this advantage of a place in the fellowship with the master into personal gain for himself. Peter's was the negative sin that comes from weakness. Judas was no passive factor in the betrayal. Peter's sin was cowardice momentarily retreating. Judas' sin was cowardice become aggressive. He feared the future and sought to make capital out of the most sacred of human goods—the confidence and love of a friend. His insensibility to the higher goods of earth marks him as in no degree a disciple of Jesus. Tradition and history have not painted him too dark.

In so far as we purchase material advantage at the cost of the higher goods of life, ours is the sin of Judas. When we permit intellectual doubt and fear for personal safety to interfere with personal devotion and loyalty to Jesus, ours is the sin of Peter. When prejudice closes the mind and life to all moral appeal in us, ours is the sin of those who tried and condemned Jesus.